

## issues - seniors

### Seniors

#### Supporting Programs Important to America's Seniors

Rep. Louise Slaughter has a long record of supporting the issues important to her older constituents. From Social Security and Medicare, to Meals on Wheels, Louise has been at the forefront of efforts to preserve these programs for current and future retirees.

#### Tackling the Problems with the Medicare Prescription Drug Plan

Over the past thirty years, medical research has produced hundreds of pharmaceuticals that can improve and prolong the health and lives of patients. In some cases, drug treatment has completely replaced surgical procedures. Clearly, Medicare should cover these important drugs and enable all seniors to access them. Too many seniors are forced to choose between their medication and other necessities because drugs are too expensive, and Medicare does not pay for them.

In 2003, the Republican Leadership of the House of Representatives forced the passage of a Medicare reform package to provide prescription drug coverage. Louise opposed this bill because she believed it would benefit drug companies while failing to promote any meaningful relief for our seniors struggling with skyrocketing prescription costs. Unfortunately, the failure of Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) to ensure a smooth transition to new Medicare Prescription Drug plan has made a bad program worse and has yielded disastrous consequences for seniors and persons with disabilities. Too many people have been given confusing information about the level of coverage

provided by the plan. Community pharmacists, nursing homes, and families throughout Western New York are now being forced to cover drug costs that Medicare is supposed to cover but has not due to administrative failures. And in some instances, beneficiaries have had to leave the pharmacy without their prescription.

Since the law was enacted, Louise has been working to reverse some of the most grievous provisions. In February 2005, she joined with like-minded colleagues in writing to Mark McClellan, Administrator at CMS, and Michael Leavitt, Secretary of HHS, to allow the federal government to negotiate prescription drug prices on behalf of Medicare beneficiaries. When this effort was ignored, she cosponsored H.R. 752, a bill that would allow Medicare beneficiaries to receive drugs through a Medicare-administered benefit rather than a private entity and allow Medicare to negotiate directly with drug companies to lower prices.

In October, anticipating that people both eligible for Medicaid and Medicare might need more time to enroll in the new drug plan, Louise called on Governor Pataki and CMS Administrator McClellan to extend implementation of the drug plan for this dual-eligible population. She also cosponsored H.R. 3861, the Medicare Informed Choice Act which would allow for continuous open enrollment in 2006, rather than the current cut-off date of May 15th, without penalty for Medicare beneficiaries.

Recently, Louise cosponsored H.R.4685, the Medicare Prescription Drug Emergency Guarantee Act to fix the problems with Medicare Part D. This bill offers several fixes to the current problems with the Medicare Drug Plan. It ensures that beneficiaries get needed medicines, whether or not the pharmacist can verify their plan. The bill would guarantee that beneficiaries would not leave their pharmacy empty-handed, and instead would get a 60-day supply of their prescription, which would continue until their coverage takes effect. H.R. 4685 would also eliminate red tape for pharmacists by allowing them to bill Medicare directly. Additionally, the bill would ensure beneficiaries could navigate the complex system, by providing instructions on how to appeal or locate a more suitable plan when a person's prescription is not covered by their current plan; and it would protect beneficiaries by not allowing plans to change what drugs they will cover.

Louise has a history of activism on the issue of seniors and prescription drug costs. Her commitment to ensuring that all seniors receive the prescription drugs they need, when they need them, has only grown stronger in the wake of the disastrous Medicare Part D program. Seniors have worked hard and paid into a system that was supposed to provide security in retirement, and that system ought to provide reliable, dependable service.

## Protecting and Expanding Medicare

Louise supported and voted for new Medicare preventive care benefits, including coverage for mammograms, screening for prostate, colorectal, and cervical cancer, and bone mass measurements for osteoporosis. At the same time, she opposed major Medicare cuts that would have forced the government either to raise premiums, deductibles, and copayments to the elderly; reduce benefits; or both. During her tenure in Congress, Louise has authored legislation to cut Medicare waste, fraud and abuse by requiring all medical equipment to bear a scannable Universal Product Number for inventory and billing purposes, as well as a bill to provide assistance and information to senior citizens who wish to purchase supplemental Medicare insurance policies (Medigap).

## Preserving Social Security

Together, Social Security and Medicare have allowed the United States to enjoy one of the lowest elderly poverty rates in the world. Louise believes firmly that Social Security must be kept on solid financial footing and has supported responsible legislation to achieve this goal. She actively opposed the President's plan to privatize Social Security because it would drain \$712 billion from the Social Security Trust Fund and slash benefits for future middle-class retirees by 40 percent. Although efforts to prevent privatization were successful last year, the President renewed his plans to

privatize Social Security in the FY07 budget. Again, Louise is committed to defeating efforts that would jeopardize the critical protections of the safety-net program by entrusting it to the whims of the stock market.

In addition, Louise has supported and voted for legislation that dramatically increased the amount beneficiaries can earn in outside income without seeing reduced Social Security benefits. She has also cosponsored legislation to amend the Government Pension Offset, which uniformly reduces Social Security benefits for government workers.

#### Keeping Seniors Healthy and Independent

Louise strongly supported reauthorization of the Older Americans Act to allow programs like Retired Seniors Volunteer Program (RSVP), Foster Grandparents, and senior employment to continue uninterrupted. She has fought to shield nutrition programs like Meals on Wheels from cuts and called on the President to fully fund the Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP) to assist the elderly and low-income families with winter heating costs.

Social Security and Medicare are among the most successful programs our country has undertaken. Older Americans have worked hard and sacrificed themselves to ensure a better, stronger country for future generations. These programs are a measure of what we truly value, and who we are as a nation. And Louise will continue to take a leading role to improve -- rather than undermine -- Social Security and Medicare.

